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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 CAIRO 005544

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SUBJECT: DEPUTY SECRETARY ZOELLICK'S JULY 13, 2005 MEETING
WITH EGYPTIAN GENERAL INTELLIGENCE SERVICE CHIEF OMAR
SOLIMAN

Classified by Charge Michael Corbin for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (U) July 13, 2005; 12:30 p.m.; Cairo, Egypt.

2. (U) Participants:

U.S.

The Deputy Secretary
Charge Michael Corbin
NEA PDAS Elizabeth Cheney
Deputy Spokesman Adam Ereli
D Executive Assistant Ross Wilson
ORA Chief
Embassy notetaker

Egypt

Egyptian General Intelligence Service (EGIS) Director Omar
Soliman
EGIS Undersecretary for Intelligence Liaison General Kennawi

Summary

3. (C) In a July 13 conversation at the Egyptian General Intelligence Service (EGIS), Deputy Secretary Zoellick discussed Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, the Middle East peace process, and Sudan with EGIS Director Soliman. On Iraq, the Deputy Secretary offered U.S. condolences on the assassination of Egypt's ambassador in Iraq and reviewed impressions from his visit to Iraq several days before, highlighting concern about Syria's role, and PM Ja'fari's interest in visiting Egypt. Soliman said that Egypt would send an ambassador back after some time and he described Egypt's work with Sunnis in Iraq, aimed at encouraging support for the political process there. Soliman urged that the U.S. open a back channel to the Syrians.

4. (C) On the Middle East Peace Process, Soliman labeled Gaza disengagement Egypt's first priority and highlighted the need for it to result in a free Gaza that controls its own territory. The Deputy Secretary expressed general support and said Abu Mazen needed to exert more "decisive control" over his security forces. The Deputy Secretary cited GOE contributions to the Sudanese peace process and called upon Egypt to better publicize its role. End Summary.

Sunni Inclusion in Iraq

5. (C) Deputy Secretary Zoellick offered his deep sympathy for the death of Egypt's chief of mission in Baghdad, Ambassador Ihab Sharif. Soliman said the GOE was astonished that the kidnappers had killed Sharif without any communication with Cairo or any indication of their demands. He said Egypt has extensive ties with Sunni tribes and families in Iraq and is trying to convince the Sunni to seek reconciliation and integration, not division. He added that Ambassador Sharif did not have any instructions to make contact with insurgents. Soliman did not think Sharif was even informed about Egypt's various links to Sunni tribes. He said the envoy's death was a blow to relations with Iraq and to Egypt's Sunni ties, but that the GOE would continue working to integrate the Sunni into Iraq's political process.

6. (C) Soliman said the GOE would send another envoy to Baghdad "after some time" and sought security coordination with the U.S. and Iraq. Egypt would maintain links with the Sunni, and EGIS would maintain its station in Iraq, as well as in Kurdistan. The Deputy Secretary noted that insurgent attacks on diplomats in Baghdad were intended to undermine foreign support for the Iraqi government. He noted that Sunni forces seemed to dismiss the possibility that they themselves would have the most to lose if they successfully split society into sectarian factions. The electoral and constitution drafting processes were giving the Sunni an appreciation for the opportunity to participate in unified governance. The Deputy Secretary had met with key Sunnis in the Constitutional Commission; they were engaged on the

substantive issues, and that demonstrates progress.

17. (C) Encouraging Iraq to complete the constitution drafting process by August 15 was important, said the Deputy Secretary. He stated that Prime Minister Ja'fari was

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sensitive about Iraq's relations with Egypt and had expressed his upset over the murder of Sharif. Ja'fari wanted to come to Cairo, the Deputy Secretary said, and sought an invitation. Such a visit would be an opportunity to discuss Egypt's offers of security training, among other topics, and a chance for Iraq to show its respect for Egypt's role in the region. The Deputy Secretary urged the GOE to consider offering an invitation.

18. (C) Highlighting the need for a three-pronged strategy to defeat an insurgency that includes political, economic and security tracks, the Deputy Secretary said he sensed progress on the ground yet called for further efforts to create a sense of momentum. This had been visible during his trip to Hillah, where provincial leaders appreciated external support and assistance in addressing provincial matters.

19. (C) Soliman asked why some quiet areas in Iraq were not enjoying a more obvious peace dividend -- a better life for Iraqis in those areas of calm would send a message to others that nonviolence is the path to prosperity. He said 70% of Sunnis hated what the insurgents were doing and were willing to work against them if life showed more signs of improvement. Soliman said the Sunni needed to be encouraged to be more in the trenches against the insurgents. The Deputy Secretary said improving the quality of life is a key objective. The U.S. was particularly focused on electricity (second only to security as a priority for Iraqis) and overcoming the highly centralized system established under Saddam. In spite of their transitional nature, Iraq's new ministers were focused on core priorities as well as longer term issues.

Syria/Lebanon

10. (C) The Deputy Secretary said Syria continued to provide a pathway for insurgents to interfere in Iraq, citing the number of persons infiltrating from abroad. Syria was both a conduit and a safe haven for these forces, he noted. Soliman said Egypt had told Syria to be careful to control the border with Iraq well before the Iraq conflict began. "No one listened," and the borders remained too open to insurgents, according to Soliman.

11. (C) Soliman claimed to have told former Secretary Powell that the U.S. "must dance with Syria" by extending a hand of cooperation and praise now and again. The Syrians would be more helpful if they felt appreciated. He cited Syria's helpful approach after September 11, 2001. Bargaining is "the way of the merchants," said Soliman, recounting that through his 30 years of dealing with the Syrians he knew that Damascus would never do something for nothing.

12. (C) The Deputy Secretary noted a "fine line" between the benefits of praising Syrian efforts and the dangers of half-efforts from Damascus in return. Key goals for Syria should be ceasing support for terrorist threatening the peace process, stopping interference in Lebanon, and keeping the border with Iraq secure. The merchant mentality also required pressure, said the Deputy Secretary, and President Asad needed to clarify in which direction he intended to lead Syria.

13. (C) Unsavory characters crossing in and out of Syria come to Egypt too said Soliman, citing his country's interest in preventing insurgent mobility. Damascus understood very well the imperative of controlling terrorist factions, said Soliman, but followed a "mistaken agenda." The U.S. could help alter that agenda through engagement, he suggested. Soliman said Asad wanted political change yet faced an old guard advising him against that. Maintaining the dignity of a proud nation was key, said Soliman. Egypt pressured Syria to accept UNSCR 1559 when Asad initially balked, according to Soliman, yet Damascus did not see sufficient improvement in relations with the U.S. and Europe in exchange for its compliance. A high priority in improving relations could be a coordinated focus on enhanced security on the Iraqi border, in addition to better cooperation from Palestinian factions.

14. (C) Regarding recent violence in Lebanon, Soliman said "stupid people" from Palestinian factions or Syrian intelligence cells might be responsible. President Asad was not culpable, he emphasized, noting that some regime elements could take action without the knowledge of Asad. Soliman described three dimensions of Lebanon's current situation: Hariri's assassination had integrated society against Syria

and created a viable opposition to pro-Syrian elements; Hizbollah found itself a significant political power making alliances with other parties; Lebanon's flagging economy would not improve without international support and the lack of an improving economy would prevent any president from unifying society. Soliman called for rebuilding capable armed forces and security services that had too long relied on Syrian expertise, pouring significant funds into the Lebanese economy, and giving full support to the elected government. Echoing Soliman on the need to support a new Lebanon, the Deputy Secretary said consideration was being given to a Beirut conference in the fall. The Government of Lebanon also needed a workable "reform approach" to the economy to overcome debt and banking challenges. Economic support and help for Lebanon to build its armed forces over time, supported by a Hizbollah that acts as a responsible political entity, would work to bolster Lebanon's prospects for stability.

Middle East Peace

15. (C) Soliman said Egypt's top priority in the Middle East peace process was Gaza disengagement. Egypt wanted to help the GOI make disengagement real and did not want Israel out of Gaza but still wielding control there. The IDF did not want to vacate the Philadelphi strip, he lamented, and was making it difficult for Prime Minister Sharon. He said Egypt was ready to alleviate pressure on the border with the dispatch of more capable border guards, but did not sense IDF flexibility in vacating the other side (Philadelphi strip).

16. (C) Clearly unhappy with the status of negotiations on the text of a protocol for dispatching border guards -- a protocol which he claimed was not needed -- Soliman said the GOI had rebuffed suggestions that Egypt might better control the entire border with Israel with military border guard units. He said the GOE and GOI continued to exchange texts (two of which he showed to the Deputy Secretary) and had essentially agreed on the substance, but the Israelis were haggling as if to prevent the agreement. Israel continued to insist on positing Egypt as primarily responsible for smuggling. He said he would call PM Sharon on July 17 to say that both militaries needed to be ordered to reach a workable agreement. Sharon, he insisted, wanted a deal soon, as did Mubarak.

17. (C) Soliman pointed out the unacceptability of moving the crossing between Egypt and Gaza from Rafah to a point at which travelers would have to transit Israel. That move would put customs control in Israeli hands, he emphasized, and was inconsistent with Palestinian control over ports and land crossings in a free Gaza. Travel between the West Bank and Gaza was also important, although Soliman said that strict Israeli control over marshaling points and train cars carrying Palestinian passengers between the two areas would create difficulties; people will not feel free and life will not improve.

18. (C) Palestinian security battalions also needed armaments and ammunition to do their job, said Soliman. Israel's refusal to permit appropriate equipment, and its suggestion that the PA gather its armaments from Hamas, indicated that Israel did not seek a cooperative effort at Gaza security. Israeli sensitivity towards security is destroying everything, he stated, adding that disengagement requires some risk. Keeping the IDF in the Philadelphi strip would also be "a disaster," according to Soliman.

19. (C) If disengagement did not progress well, Soliman said the GOI might not be in a position to offer additional withdrawals in 2006, but every effort should be made to keep momentum moving towards more changes the following year. He called for a conference on refugee issues in 2006 to give people hope.

20. (C) The Deputy Secretary agreed that long term momentum was important, but that a successful initial withdrawal was also key. He said Abu Mazen needed to exert more control over his security forces and the Syrians needed to give some thought to their role as well. The Deputy Secretary cited the value of the Wolfensohn and Ward missions to "bring people together." Until Abu Mazen takes "decisive control," said the Deputy Secretary, Israel would take a tough stance on security. The Deputy Secretary said the USG would see what it could do with regards to the border guard deployment issue, as well as in addressing barriers and issues associated with customs and airports.

Sudan

21. (C) The Deputy Secretary commented favorably on GOE contributions to the peace process in Sudan and called for

ongoing engagement to combine implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement with progress on Darfur. He said the Abuja process was critical to show that the benefits of the North-South agreement could be replicated in other areas. Soliman agreed that the U.S. and Egypt must work together towards a stable Sudan, a country whose neighbors did not all work to enhance its stability. He cited Eritrea as a wild card. Soliman emphasized that signing agreements was much easier than implementing them, and the need for Sudan's neighbors to stay engaged.

¶22. (C) The Deputy Secretary suggested that Egypt be more active in touting its efforts in Sudan to the U.S. Congress. Egypt's engagement overcame a sense of division between the Arab world and Africa, he noted, and was indicative of Egypt's important regional role.

¶23. (U) This message has been cleared by D.

¶24. (U) Khartoum minimize considered.

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CORBIN